

From: john eger [mailto:jegeer@mail.sdsu.edu]
Sent: Thursday, April 10, 2008 3:46 PM
To: john eger
Subject: I thought the attached re Balboa Park might be of interest



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Preserving, Maintaining Balboa Park Becomes Urgent Concern

Commentary - John M. Eger

According to a recent report, Balboa Park "faces a backlog of deferred maintenance estimated at a minimum of \$238 million."

Last month, Mayor Jerry Sanders addressed the first public meeting of the Balboa Park Committee to discuss the future of the park and admitted that just keeping the park maintained was not possible.

Looking ahead, the city did not see any brighter future.

These are all good people. They care deeply about the park, but after three hours of who is going to fix the "pothole" - that may be too harsh a characterization - no one asked why? Why does the park really matter? Why should it take precedence over everything else that is going south?

Or as Rebecca Morales, curator of the park's San Diego Automotive Museum, asked: What is the vision for the future of Balboa Park?

If it's the "crown jewel" as both the mayor and Councilwoman Toni Atkins called it, why aren't we mad as hell?

With all the research and education already going on in the park why isn't it "Smithsonian West," as Morales put it.

Speaker after speaker confirmed reports that the park is not safe at night, paint is peeling off walls and ceilings; homelessness resides in its canyons and even museum doorways in off hours.

Parking and transit problems continue to worsen.

But the overriding concern: "No new investments are being made as the cost of repairs continue to escalate." And there have been many buildings and exhibits contemplated over the years but never funded.

Years In The Making

Called "The Soul of San Diego: Keeping Balboa Park Magnificent in its Second Century," (www.balboapark.org), the report, several years in the making, says, "No one knows how close to the tipping point Balboa Park is - the point where repairs become truly overwhelming and when the Park's condition begins to

negatively impact on the health of the city at large."

Lease agreements for upkeep on some museums and the zoo have lightened the load, but the city's financial burdens are simply too great.

Three scenarios for broad-based management of the park were laid out: 1) "Retaining city ownership and signing an agreement with a private nonprofit entity to assist as a partner; 2) signing a joint powers agreement with one or more government agencies such as San Diego County and our cities within the county; or 3) creating a brand new park district specifically to run it autonomously."

While the financial future of the park is in a downward spiral - and some employees are worried about whether they will continue to be city employees or part of some new, yet to be formed, nonprofit - the real issues, as are so often the case, are not financial alone.

The issues are real, they are urgent and of utmost concern to all San Diegans.

Eger is a journalism professor at San Diego State University and a member of the Envision San Diego partnership, a media forum for discussing public policy issues affecting the region.

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